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R 090641Z SEP 09  
FM AMCONSUL LAHORE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4169  
INFO RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 4873  
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 2148  
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR 1828  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0491  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0197  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0871  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHMFISS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL  
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC  
RUEFHLC/DEPT OF HOMELAND SECURITY WASHINGTON DC  
RULSDMK/DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION WASHINGTON DC  
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 5326

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LAHORE 000183

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [EAIR](#) [ECIN](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: NON-STOP FLIGHTS FROM LAHORE TO NEW YORK LOOK LIKELY

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Lahore International Airport (LHE) may meet security standards required for direct flights to the United States, according to a Transportation Security Administration (TSA) observation team that conducted a survey at LHE August 24-28. The TSA team noted that LHE officials had acted on recommendations made by previous surveys, and responded quickly when the current team pointed out security gaps. They found some lapses that U.S. assistance could address, but left impressed overall with the level of security at LHE. End Summary.

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BACKGROUND

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¶2. (SBU) A Transportation Security Administration (TSA) team assessed security operations at Lahore International Airport (LHE) August 24-28, as the initial step of re-certifying LHE for direct flights to the United States. The team measured Lahore against the requirements of International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Annex 17, noting that the airport had improved markedly after each of the previous three visits. In 2007 TSA had recommended that direct flights to the United States be authorized. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), however, withheld approval of direct flights pending a further agreement on sharing passenger information. DHS has since de-linked the issues.

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LHE DEMONSTRATES GOOD SECURITY PRACTICES . . .

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¶3. (SBU) In an August 28 de-brief to Post, the TSA team said they were generally pleased with what they saw at LHE. The

first survey had revealed non-functional x-ray machines and inadequate fencing, for example, but such problems no longer existed. Pakistan's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) had pored through prior TSA reports and ensured all shortcomings were fixed. TSA noted that perimeter security, baggage scanning equipment, and third-party certification of one layer of screening personnel had all improved. Moreover, during the latest survey the CAA responded immediately to TSA suggestions. For instance, the team pointed out unacceptable brush growth along a security fence. Within 72 hours LHE staff had cleared the brush, and discovered and repaired holes in the fence. Overall, the team assessed, LHE had demonstrated a commitment to uphold security practices on par with international airports.

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. . . AND THE AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT - AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

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14. (SBU) TSA's team tentatively identified areas for improvement in CAA's airport operations at the national level, not Lahore specifically. The absence of statistically significant tests means that the Pakistan aviation authorities lack a formal risk assessment methodology, making it difficult for CAA to identify patterns and vulnerabilities. In addition, CAA has only one qualified airport inspector for the entire country; TSA would like an inspector at each major airport. The

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TSA team believed it was lack of resources, rather than lack of will, limiting CAA capacity.

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MOU FOR RECIPOCAL SECURITY OBSERVATION VISITS?

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15. (SBU) TSA said it hoped to secure a government-to-government Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or a non-binding agreement allowing ongoing, reciprocal security observation visits at LHE and John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK) in New York. TSA must conduct inspections at least once a year to ensure airports maintain ICAO standards. Other host country authorities have obstructed or delayed visits in the absence of such agreements. An MOU would help assure ongoing access to LHE if/when direct flights to JFK begin.

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LOCAL POLITICAL, COMMERCIAL INTEREST IN DIRECT FLIGHTS

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16. (SBU) The August 30 edition of the Daily Times reported on the generally positive survey results, apparently based on conversations with CAA personnel. On August 31, Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif told Principal Officer that direct flights from Lahore to New York would ease Punjab's accessibility and build business ties at a critical time for Pakistan-American relations.

17. (SBU) Comment: With over 60 percent of Pakistan's population residing in Punjab, direct flights from Lahore would be a vote of confidence in a city that suffered a few high-profile terrorist attacks in early 2009. Post agreed with the TSA team's assessment that providing capacity-building resources to the CAA would help maintain the current high security standards observed at LHE, and is happy to facilitate future activity in this regard. We understand TSA's concern about access to conduct future annual inspections, but have not seen evidence that they will face difficulty in the future here. An agreement or MOU that stresses the reciprocal nature of these security observation visits should make such a document palatable to the GOP, but we wish to avoid linking the start of direct flights to an agreement on reciprocal access.

CONROY